

## **Fox Chapel students add stories to Veterans History Project**

### **Valley News Dispatch**

**March 18, 2012, By: Jodi Weigand**

Marine Corps Cpl. Sean Godfrey searched for words as he tried to explain what military combat is like to a group of high school students.

"It's the extreme of everything," he said. "In combat, you're pumping so hard that time just slows. It's a haze."

Godfrey, 25, of Moon was a machine gunner in the 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment from 2006-10. He served in Operation Iraqi Freedom from April to October 2007, and in 2008 he was stationed with the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, a floating military base deployed to areas where there may be a threat and quick deployment needed.

He was among 10 veterans whom Fox Chapel Area High School hosted on Friday to videotape their stories for the Veterans History Project, an initiative of the Library of Congress to document personal accounts of wars from World War I to the present day.

U.S. Rep. Jason Altmire, D-McCandless, partnered with the school for the event, and his office will submit the interviews to the Library of Congress.

Altmire's veterans and outreach coordinator, Nick Demicheli, 27, of Bethel Park, was among those interviewed. He served in the Army from 2003-09 as a specialist in the 463rd Engineer Battalion during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

He thanked the students for helping document veterans' experiences.

"It's very valuable, just as service to our nation is valuable," Demicheli said.

Fox Chapel senior Connor Whelan, 17, who served as host for Vietnam War veteran Thomas Reilly, 65, of Center Township, said he was surprised to see the younger faces among the vets.

"I was at the door and one younger guy was coming in, and I didn't know he was a veteran," Whelan said. "He looked just a couple of years older than me. It's hard to believe."

During Godfrey's interview, questions ranged from why he enlisted to what boot camp and serving overseas were like.

Among the shortcomings were the sand fleas he encountered during boot camp on Parris Island, S.C., and not using a porcelain toilet for seven months while stationed in Iraq.

"We had Porta-Johns, and you can only go during the evenings because with the sun, it's 140 degrees," Godfrey said. "I used to count, and I had eight seconds before I started sweating."

Among the benefits are the discipline and strength he acquired, as well as bragging rights.

Godfrey said he arrived at Camp Lejeune, N.C., just a few days before he was assigned to teach a group of 100 men how to use an automatic grenade launcher.

He was "terrified," Godfrey said, mainly because he had not paid as much attention as he should have in the School of Infantry.

"That's the point where I started to crack down on learning things," Godfrey said. "I got to the point where officers would fight over whose truck I would ride in because I was one of the top machine gunners in the battalion."

Although Godfrey described his service with a sort of excited reverence and still chases that same high of being in combat, he admitted he sometimes struggles with the consequences of going to war.

"A lot of bad things happen, and they have happened," Godfrey said. "Your buddies dying, your buddies losing their minds -- it's terrible."

He said he "probably" suffers from post traumatic stress disorder and occasionally has nightmares, but Godfrey told the students that he knew what he was signing up for when, at 19, he told his Marine Corps recruiter that he wanted to join the infantry division.

"I don't think everyone should have to do it; that's why I'm glad it's volunteer," Godfrey said. "I don't ever consider myself a hero. It was just a job. It's no different going to work being a nurse, coming to school. It's just different circumstances."